

Throughout history, women have made a significant difference with our hands, our minds and our courage. Once women joined the workforce at large, the impact was inevitable. Women have changed the face of business, and made significant contributions in a variety of industries.

A considerable number of women entered the workforce during World War II. Women by the millions took factory jobs to make up for the domestic manpower shortage. After the war, the number of working women dropped, but by 1950 it was climbing again, at the rate of a million a year. By 1990, the work force was 47 percent female and 53 percent male, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Many view this as one of the most important and desirable social and economic transformations of our lifetimes. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and until this recession, women remained less than 49 percent of the work force. However, that percentage has now passed 49 percent and may cross the 50 percent threshold for the first time. As we cross this threshold it only makes sense to assess where we stand and set goals for the future.

Women have carved out a place for themselves in the workforce, and often have detached themselves from native qualities that have the most leadership potential. In her book, *Designed for Success*, Dondi Scumaci reviews the qualities that are widely understood to be leadership qualities, and juxtaposes them against the descriptions women most often face at work. Feminine descriptions such as catty, nurturing, empathetic, and aggressive are *not associated* as qualities suited for a role at the leadership table. Today, women are ready to re-assess the qualities that have brought them this far and look forward to the qualities that will take them further.

#### **Silence is Golden, but Negotiation is Priceless**

Women are still reluctant to ask for what they want in a work situation. In her book, Ms. Scumaci asserts that women tend to take the first salary offer from an employer rather than negotiating. Women have a tendency to view this as confrontational, and Ms. Scumaci predicates that men negotiate salaries more readily because they view it as a challenge rather than a confrontation. Lack of negotiation can lead to resentment later on when responsibilities in the workplace become greater and the real work begins. Many women are left feeling taken advantage of because they didn't assert their true salary expectations during the interview process. Women who make no apologies for their expectations and have the courage to ask for the salaries they want and need are the top earners today. You will never get what you want if you don't ask for it!

#### **Listen and Grow**

Women will continue to progress in the workplace, and in our developing roles we must be able to effectively take constructive feedback from peers, leadership, and people that we trust to be honest with us. We also have to be willing to accept the information given to us and use it to become more effective leaders in the workplace. Growth is always contingent on our willingness to be confident enough to admit when change is needed.

#### **Woman, Market Thyself**

Marketing. Women all over the world have entered the marketing field and are marketing their companies' products. Why, then is it so hard market oneself? It is essential that women in the workplace develop a plan to strategically market themselves in order to develop, grow and position their careers for an ever-changing marketplace. Women need to establish strong personal branding both in



peers. Your mother may have told you not to "toot your own horn," but if you want people to notice your successes in a fast-paced environment, you had better pull out your tuba and get busy.

#### **Communicate, Lead, Mentor**

Most of us these days think of ourselves as self-actualized communicators. Have you, however, ever worked for someone that you felt was aggressive? In one scenario in this book, there is a female leader that led her team by intimidation. Her employees were afraid to speak to her or even ask questions. Due to this, the morale and productivity in the department was extremely low. This is how she *wanted* to be viewed, and she did not realize that this behavior would have such a negative impact on her organization. She honestly thought she was leading...because she thought that fear was a motivator and that if her employees viewed her as invulnerable, she would earn their respect. The opposite was true. Women don't need to be aggressors in order to get people to listen or cooperate.

Conversely, I can remember a point in my career back in 1996 when I worked for a female SVP. Initially, though she was knowledgeable in her field, she seemed intimidating. This woman saw leadership qualities in me and gave me an opportunity that I never thought was possible at my level. She saw abilities in me that had not been activated and gave me a chance. We started a new division within the organization. With her continued mentorship and my willingness to push myself, we put together the number one direct hire administrative division of the company in Dallas. Though I don't work with her any more, she remains a strong professional influence in my life to this day.

Can you see the difference? Both women were getting things done, but the woman who encouraged me was creating a future for her company, for me, and for herself. Mentorship is a win-win proposition. Women need to capitalize on our *best* qualities to become the leaders who will open doors for the next generation. We should encourage our employees to be a part of the decision-making process, and mentor them as we lead. The returns are worth it.

Dondi Scumaci has written a useful book that asks women to take an honest look at the way we do business. If you are a woman or a man who works with women, I highly recommend that you read this book. Everyone can benefit from the advice and wisdom within. I did. I sincerely look forward to what the future has to hold for women in the workplace. As we press into this new economy, we will need the tools that Dondi Scumaci presents to thrive.

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